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Editorial: Boost, but for whom?

Gov. Mike Pence has suggested an increase in school funding in his budget proposal released Thursday. But, there is a catch: Most of that would go to private school vouchers and charter schools.

“The governor’s plan presented to legislators would increase school funding by 2 percent, or \$134 million, in the first year of the state budget, and then by 1 percent in the second year,” reported The Associated Press. “It would give \$1,500 more per student for charter schools at an estimated cost of \$41 million over the two years. It also lifts the school voucher program’s limit on per-student funding, which the Pence administration projects will cost \$4 million yearly.”

Republicans in the state rejected a call from Democrats to specify exactly how much money is going toward traditional public schools, charter schools and the private school voucher program.

One thing everyone should be able to agree on is the need for more funding for education in the state.

According to a National Education Association report issued March 12, 2014, our state has much work to do in this department. Indiana was cited

as one of the states with the highest number of students enrolled per teacher in public elementary and secondary schools with 18.6. From 2003 to 2013, Indiana had one of the steepest declines (adjusted for inflation) in average teacher salaries of 12.3 percent. (The national average was 3.2 percent.) And between 2012 and 2013, Indiana had the largest such decrease in the country. Our per student expenditures were listed as one of the lowest, with a figure of \$8,064.

Remember former Gov. Mitch Daniels' \$300 million cut in education spending in 2009?

We should be ashamed of these numbers. And yet superintendents of urban school districts fear more education money will go to richer, suburban schools.

"Pence has proposed spending more on private school vouchers and charter schools, and he said that money should be spent on 'funding excellence,'" reporter CNHI's Maureen Hayden in a story we published Dec. 13, 2014. "[Goshen Superintendent Diane] Woodworth said she worries that means less for traditional public schools with large numbers of students in poverty. Test scores, routinely used to benchmark schools, are typically lower in those schools than in wealthier districts."

While this GOP proposal appears on the surface to be an increase in school funding, what does end up in public school coffers is really a back-filling of the losses sustained in previous education budgets.